

## Backcountry Health

### lightning



Lightning kills more people in the U.S. each year than all other natural disasters combined. When we consider that Michigan ranks in the top 10 states with the highest number of lightning casualties, we can better understand the importance of taking safety precautions. But when should you seek shelter, and what should you do if no shelter is available?

Dark, heavy clouds, late on a warm day may signal an approaching thunderstorm. Seek shelter as soon as you hear thunder or see lightning, as strikes may occur even when the actual storm is miles away. Shelter can be a vehicle that has been moved away from trees and power lines, but avoid touching anything metal inside. When in a building, stay away from windows and avoid using water, appliances and telephones.

When shelter is unavailable, you can still keep yourself safe. Get away from power lines, wire fences and any body of water. Ditch the fishing pole, paddle, or metal-framed backpack. Never stand under a tall tree in an open area or on a hilltop, rather, seek a low area away from single trees. If in a forest, find an area under thick growth. Place an insulating material like a sleeping bag or life jacket between yourself and the ground. Crouch down, but

don't lie flat, and separate yourself from others by several yards.

If someone is struck by lightning, call for medical help, if able. If their breathing or heart has stopped, start CPR immediately. The victim will not carry an electric charge and can be handled without injury to the rescuer. 🏠

—Sharon Lee Maloney, R.N.